

“THE SHOPS AND SHOP-ASSISTANTS ACT, 1894.”

This Act and its numerous amendments are working fairly well. There is very little difficulty with the shopkeepers now they recognise the fact that they cannot infringe the Act for any length of time with impunity, so they cheerfully conform to its requirements. The Chinamen are observing the Act now without causing any trouble. As a matter of fact, the only people who are complaining are the clerks in commercial offices. Recently I examined the attendance-book of an insurance office, and found conclusive evidence that some of the clerks were employed in contravention of the Act. The manager and chief clerk were both new arrivals from Australia. The chief clerk pleaded ignorance of the law, and said he was sure the manager (who was absent at the time) was not aware that he was doing wrong. I explained the law and cautioned him.

There has been a slight decrease in the overtime evil so far as the gentler sex is concerned, as 255 persons have worked 3,448 hours, as against 4,088 hours for last year. Of course, the adult male assistants are still unrestricted in working overtime, and are brought back much too often in some establishments.

Prosecutions.—There were four cases during the year. Convictions were secured in each case.

SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES ACT.

This Act is working very well. Very few complaints are heard except from the licensees, who often complain that they are frequently inconvenienced by the girls declining to fill their engagements. There are thirteen offices licensed.

In conclusion, I have to thank all with whom my duties have brought me into contact for their uniform courtesy and consideration.

I have, &c.,

Edward Tregear, Esq., Chief Inspector, Wellington.

JAMES SHANAGHAN,
Inspector of Factories.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Wellington, 31st March, 1902.

I have the honour to submit my report for the year ending 31st March, 1902.

FACTORIES ACT.

During the year I have visited a very large number of factories and workrooms where women are employed, throughout the colony, and am pleased to state that I found them generally in a very satisfactory condition. Special attention has been given to the sanitary arrangements, general cleanliness, &c., of factories and workshops, and where improvement has been required very little trouble has been experienced in getting employers to comply with the wishes of the Inspector. Many new buildings have been erected, and are fitted with every modern convenience for the comfort of workers.

The question of better sanitation in some of the small towns is one which needs urgent and careful attention. Much improvement can still be effected in this direction in many of these places. It is of little use for Inspectors to give instructions for windows and ventilators to be opened for the purpose of making workrooms fresh and healthy, when it is only to let in the unpleasant and unhealthy atmosphere arising from an earth-closet standing under the window or close by the side wall. In fact, in some instances I have known them to be under the same roof. The change from forty-eight working-hours per week to forty-five is a great benefit to women workers, and is much appreciated by them.

Re overtime: Many people hold the opinion that the possibilities of working after 6 p.m. should be reduced to a minimum. In fact, some hold the opinion that overtime should only be permitted in urgent cases. There can be no question that working late in close, heated rooms is injurious to young girls, and it is a great pity that, apparently, trade cannot be so arranged as to make the practice unnecessary; but to do away with it altogether would, I fear, only lead to a greater evil—viz., taking the work home.

SHOPS AND SHOP-ASSISTANTS ACTS.

These Acts have worked smoothly during the year, but considerable amendment is required. The necessity for a legally recognised closing-hour is still very much felt. The larger business places of the colony observe 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., with one hour off for lunch, as their regular working-hours; but as the law stands at present that is purely optional—the Act allowing employers to keep their assistants 9½ and 11½ hours per day, excepting on the day of the half-holiday, or fifty-two hours per week, and the smaller shopkeepers frequently avail themselves of this to the fullest extent by bringing their assistants back almost every night in the week, but their time is so regulated as to keep within the fifty-two hours. In my opinion, the regular custom of the trade should be taken as the standard for fixing the legal hours. If it were required, exception could be made in favour of trades the nature of whose business rendered it necessary to keep open late; then it should be compulsory on employers to have the written consent of the Inspector, and all persons required to work such overtime should receive reasonable remuneration for the hours worked. At present, as a general rule, shop-assistants are not paid for overtime.

SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICES ACT.

This Act has worked well, only three prosecutions being reported for the whole of the colony during the year. The scarcity of domestic servants still continues, and both office-keepers and mistresses are glad to get girls, even at their own terms.